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A Feather and a Straw



A Feather and a Straw

by

Walter Brooks

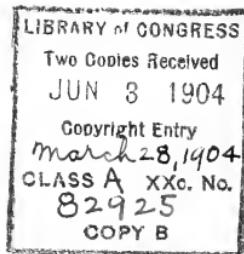
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Imagination



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

I SEE a cork dance lightly on the wave,
A straw and feather join the breeze in sport.

Some truant fancies I attempt to save
Flee out of reach, refusing to be caught.



Chance



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

THE given hour is past—
The foolish virgins try the door—’tis fast.
A voice cries from within : “ ’Tis vain to wait;
Away ! Away ! You come too late.”

Hark ! ’Tis a dreamer’s knock—
“ I have no time to lose. Make haste, unlock.
Not for myself—to man I bring a boon.”
“ Away ! Away ! You come too soon.”

The ruthless ticking of the clock of fate
Repeats incessantly “ too soon, too late.”



Solitude



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

TWO boon companions
Yesterday, now and to-morrow,
Ready to share
Trouble and care
Sadness and sorrow.

Two boon companions
Morning and noontime and eve;
Each fancy caught,
Each changing thought,
Quick to perceive,
Bonds even death cannot sever,
So strong the tie;
Two boon companions for ever,—
Myself and I.



Love's Needs

A FEATHER AND A STRAW

I

I STEPPED from childhood's land,
Where flowers grow wild
And gaily mingle colors in confusion,
Into youth's garden where design is met—
And flowers are trained to grow as man
And not as nature wills.

A woman waited there,
A woman in her youth,
She turned to me and smiled
And offered me her lips—
I felt myself a Man.

A FEATHER AND A STRAW

II

Again I stepped into a formal court
With marble walks ablaze with light,
Where music charmed and art refined.

A woman waited there,
A woman past her youth,
She turned to me and smiled
And offered me her mind—
I felt myself a God.

A FEATHER AND A STRAW

III

Down darkened steps I trod
Into a lonely spot,
Saw bare and broken boughs,
And heard the sound of withered leaves beneath my
feet.

A woman waited there,
A woman past her youth—yes, well beyond,
She turned to me and smiled
And offered me her hand—
I felt myself a Child.



Failure



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

EACH morning as I wake, hope brings to me
A jeweled casket with a golden key.

At evening disappointment by my bed,
Presents to me a casket made of lead.



Diversion



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

THEY laugh—a sunbeam darts across a shade—
The youth is twenty; seventeen the maid.

Combine their ages, mine is still beyond.
I laugh—the chords are sluggish to respond.

A ripple yonder; here the stream is deep.
Their laugh is merry—I laugh, not to weep.



Fate's Gifts



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

I

A GROUP of rustics at a country Fair
Stood open-mouthed before a Wheel of Chance.

The sailor loathes the sea and loves the shore.
The prince must rule although he covets rest.
The beggar would be king.
The hero craves the prattle of the child.
And youth desires manhood.

A FEATHER AND A STRAW

II

A group of rustics at a country Fair
Stood open-mouthed before a Wheel of Chance.
The penny paid, each knew the prize he wished.

The showman turned the Wheel.
Though others say he smiled,
I thought I saw a sneer.

The needle stopped.
The dullard drew a book;
The withered crone a doll;
The child,—a crucifix.

Reality



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

I DREW a picture, people stopped and gazed;
Some frowned, some were abashed and some amazed.

They read the name and turned away with jeers—
“Man, as he is—and not as he appears.”



Youth



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

I

O H Youth and Innocence! Oh Man and Brute!
How fairer far the blossom than the fruit!
How better far to wonder than to know!
What choicer gifts has nature to bestow?

A FEATHER AND A STRAW

II

A faded flower Age had cast aside
Youth finds and gives to Innocence, his bride.
She smiles and puts it fondly in her hair,
Enjoys the perfume—though no longer there.

As Youth and Innocence together go,
They meet Misfortune whom they do not know.
They greet him—show him smiles in place of tears,
Misfortune hesitates—then disappears.

A FEATHER AND A STRAW

III

Oh Youth and Innocence!
 What more, in sooth,
Can Nature give
 Than Innocence and Youth?



Illusions



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

I

A TRICKSTER hid a coin in a cloth
And bade me hold it,
Saying it were mine.
I pressed with all my force
And felt I had it fast;
He spoke a magic word
And waved a wand,
I looked—and it was gone.

A FEATHER AND A STRAW

II

Pressed close against my heart
I held a daughter, mine,
Half woman and half child,
Gave all the love I knew
And felt she gave return;
But Cupid waved a wand
And said a magic word,
I looked—and she was gone.

Lightheartedness



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

TOUCH only the note of laughter,
Awaken no minor chord;
The present is soon hereafter—
Hereafter is unexplored.

Then here's a snap of the finger,
A toast to the butterfly—
A day in the light to linger,
Crawl into the dark to die.



Destiny



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

I

TWO streamlets leave the spring which gave them birth,
And take their separate journeys to the sea.

One seeks the meadows and the haunts
Of nature undisturbed and nature's peace,
And one the stir of life,
With chance to show
Its beauty at the cataract,
Its power at the mill.

A FEATHER AND A STRAW

II

Two sisters leave the fireside of childhood,
The quiet and the shelter of a home.

One takes the path where poverty is met,
A path guilt makes unsafe and misery unclean,
Adopts the garb of blackest night
To do the deeds of day.
The other sees a light and hears a laugh,
And follows where they lead.

Two streamlets take their journeys to the sea,
Two sisters leave the shelter of a home.

Temperaments



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

I

OH dreary day and dread!
How shun despair?
How venture to beguile,
With song and smile,
As if the skies were fair?
Thick clouds are overhead.
Why think to see the light
When all is night?
Oh dreary day and dread!

A FEATHER AND A STRAW

II

Most beautiful of days!
Why then insist
That clouds obscure the sun
When only one,
Fast fading into mist,
Serves, not to hide its rays,
But to diffuse the light
Elsewise too bright—?
Most beautiful of days!

Blossoms



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

I

A HEEL had crushed a snowdrop
Which on a wintry morning
Had raised its head above its coverlid of snow,
To take a peep and see if spring had come
And it were time to wake and sing.
How pure, how tender, how expectant!

A FEATHER AND A STRAW

II

An infant from beneath its coverlid of snowy lace
Gazed out with large round eyes into the world
To see what it were like,
And learn if it were time to wake and sing.
How pure, how tender, how expectant!

Two coarsely visaged men had dug a hole,
And in it put a corpse,
And raised above it was a granite stone
On which was cut a cherub head between two angel wings.

A FEATHER AND A STRAW

III

A heel had crushed a snowdrop
Which on a wintry morning
Had raised its head above its coverlid of snow,
To see if spring had come
And it were time to wake and sing.



The Prayer Rug



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

I

A FILTHY hut, a tottering Eastern loom;
Ideas of form and color wrung from tired brain,
Applied with trembling hand;
A fabric fashioned in despair,
The warp a shudder and the weft a curse—
A rug for prayer.

A FEATHER AND A STRAW

II

A court of tiles; a holy man presents,
With hands upheld, petition to his God.
Does Allah hear him ask
“ Make me to all my fellows just and fair? ”
No! 'Tis the fear of death which prompts its use—
A rug for prayer.

A FEATHER AND A STRAW

III

The whir of wheels, the jeering hiss of steam,
The gold and silver dug from tired brain and wrought
 by trembling hand.
The die sunk in despair,
The imprint shows a slave in chains who makes—
 A rug for prayer.

A FEATHER AND A STRAW

IV

A church of stone a holy man has built,
With hands upheld presents it to his God.
And does he say
“To all mankind I have been just and fair”?
No! 'Tis the fear of death which prompts its use—
A rug for prayer.

Consolation



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

A ROSE is crushed—
Its wounded petals yield
A wealth of perfume
Hitherto concealed.

A heart is torn;
Affliction, sad and sore,
Awakens melodies
Unheard before.



Two Phases



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

WHEREFORE the clamor and press of folk,
And why the parson?
I see a gibbet trimmed with crape,
And hear the noise of iron chains.
Alas! Alas!

And still the clamor and press of folk,
And still the parson.
But drawing near I see instead a bower, rose bedecked,
And hear the noise of jeweled chains.
Alas! Alas!



The Mermaid



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

I

COME to the shore of the sea, my love,
 Come where the waters roll.
The waves rebound with their beaded spray,
The shadows are eager to join in play;
List to the story I have to tell,
Confided to me by a great sea shell,
 And brought from the land of the soul.

A FEATHER AND A STRAW

II

Come to the shore of the sea, my love,
 Come when the waters croon.

The moonlit waves bring a wond'rous calm,
The winds are tempered and rich with balm;
They will hold us fast in a fairy spell,
And whisper secrets we may not tell—
 Secrets learned none too soon.

A FEATHER AND A STRAW

III

Come to the shore of the sea, my love,
 Come while the waters sleep.
When dance is ended and story told,
I will build you a bower of green and gold;
Seaweed green on the golden sand,
And leave you there when I flee the land—
 As I must—for the ocean's deep.



Happiness



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

THE toiler finds in toil his sole delight,
The student ponders far into the night,
A town is built — a theory is taught,
The world is richer by a deed — a thought.

The world is richer — richer yes, in care,
Let's blow a bubble, toss it in the air,
Leave work and study — follow where it takes;
Admire the changing colors e'er it breaks.

As joy is sweeter seen in other's eyes,
The bubble serves but to reflect the skies.
Come! follow, follow! toiler you or seer,
A moment more 'twill burst and leave a tear.



Who Knows?



A FEATHER AND A STRAW

FROM darkness come—we go into the dark—
Who knows?
Life gives to each at birth a tiny spark;
It grows,
If watched and fed, into a flame,
Which shows
A potent light the world calls fame.
It glows
A little, flickers, is again a spark.
We go into the dark—
Who knows?



Life

A FEATHER AND A STRAW

A NARROW scope,
A little joy,
A flash of hope,
A broken toy.
To give—not get—
Love and regret;
To climb a hill with toil,
And find it bare of soil;
Perhaps a helping hand—

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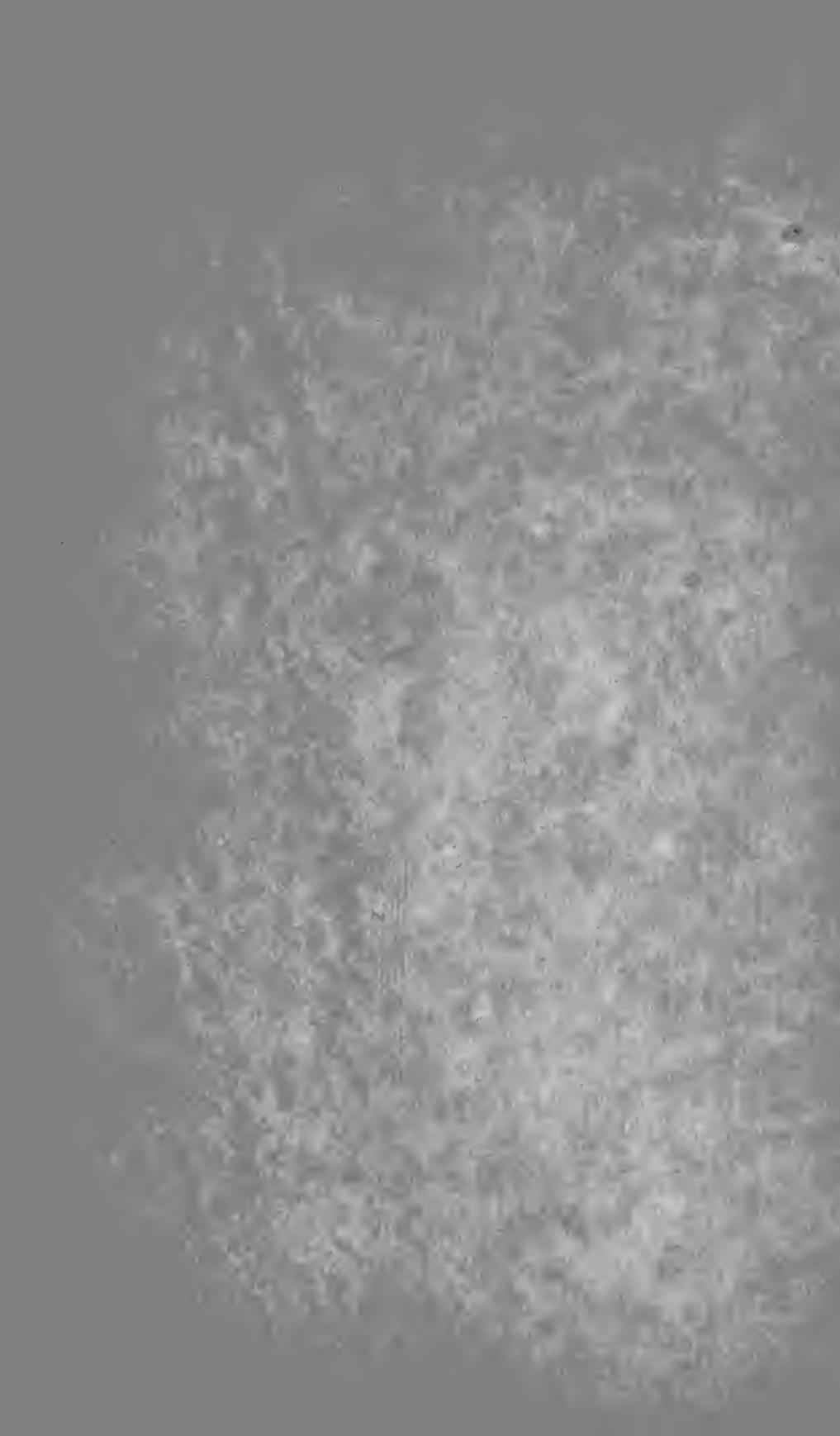
A lull,
A heap of sand—
A skull.





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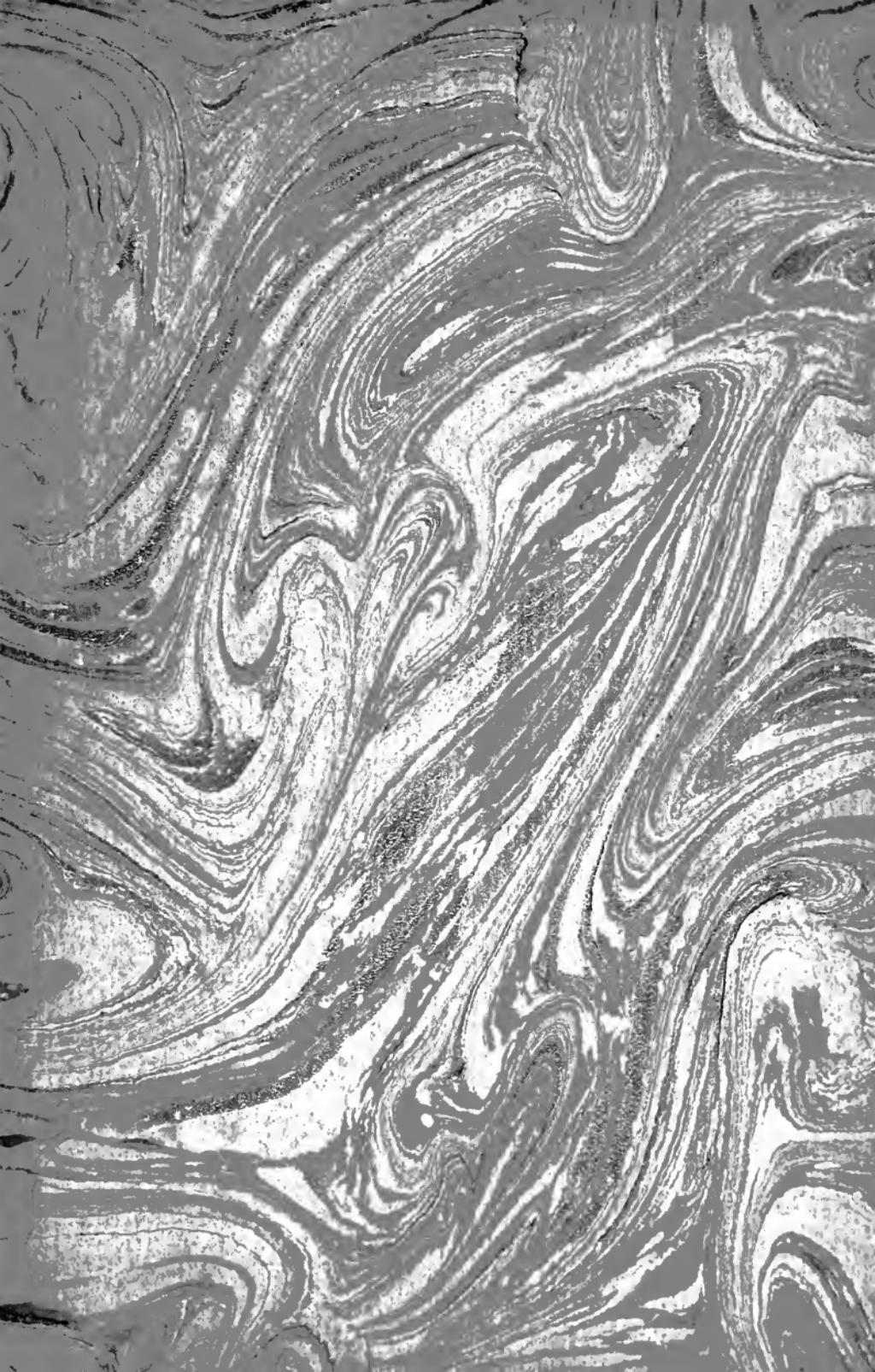
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